

December 17, 2001

Dean Hannelore Rader
University Librarian
University of Louisville
Louisville Kentucky 40292

Dear Dean Rader:

Across the globe, the rapid development and the pervasive expansion of information and communication technology tools to all facets of life, and at all levels from nation-states to individuals, is changing the nature of society forever, and irreversibly. Huge sums are being expended for communications network and computer technologies in the hope of economic improvement, better education, strengthened public policy-making, and enhanced quality of life. To date, the results – while making many new millionaires – have not paid off either for the economically and socially at-risk, or for the poor countries of the world.

Paradoxically, the very power of the Internet to provide access to a growing tidal wave of information resources is proving to be an immense barrier to those very segments of the population which could benefit the most from its utilization, including the disabled, minorities, the aged, and other disadvantaged groups. In short, one of the outcomes of our increasingly hi-tech world is a growing Digital Divide.

Against the background of these developments, I am writing you on behalf of UNESCO, the National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL) and the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) to invite you to contribute a paper to, and participate in, a Meeting of Experts on Information Literacy, to be held in Prague, The Czech Republic, April 11-13, 2002. More specifically, you are requested to prepare a paper on a mutually agreeable topic based on informal discussions that either may have already begun between you and Dr. Patricia Breivik and/or Dr. Woody Horton, or will soon take place, following the specifications in Attachment B. The paper must be electronically transmitted to us by March 1, 2002, and your active participation in the meeting will also be required. A \$500 stipend for the paper will be offered, which can either be given to you as an honorarium, or applied to your travel costs to the meeting.

For the purposes of providing a starting point to guide the Meeting of Experts, the preliminary working definition of information literacy is as follows.

People are information literate who know when they need information, and are then able to identify, locate, evaluate, organize, and effectively use that information to address and help resolve personal and family, job-related, or broader social issues or problems with which they must cope.

We hope this preliminary working definition will be strengthened as a result of the deliberation of the participants at the Meeting of Experts.

In recent weeks you may have already been informally contacted by Dr. Breivik or Dr. Horton to solicit an expression of your interest in being considered as an invited participant, and/or to discuss a possible topic for a paper to be prepared. Please regard this letter as an official invitation.

Logistical, financial, and administrative details of the meeting, including agenda and format, guest keynote speakers, specific paper topics, and so forth, are still being worked out. As Dr. Breivik or Dr. Horton may have indicated to you, funds have not yet been fully secured. A brief description of the background, and purpose of the meeting is provided in the documents in Attachment A.

The results of the Meeting of Experts' work will not only feed directly into helping to finalize details for a much larger public conference that will be held later, sometime in 2003, but also lead into several other following major international initiatives. These include UNESCO's strategy for its *Information For All* programme, and the forthcoming *World Summit on the Information Society* (WSIS) under the leadership of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) and in close cooperation with other interested United Nations agencies, scheduled for Geneva in December 2003. The latter meeting will bring together Heads of State, Executive Heads of United Nations agencies, industry leaders, non-government organizations, civil society and media representatives. Your recommendations on additional international, regional, sub-regional, or national meetings, which could profit from the results of the Information Literacy Meeting of Experts, as well as the larger follow-up conference, would be appreciated at anytime.

Because participation is limited to no more than 40 people, your earliest response is requested. Please e-mail Patricia Breivik, NFIL Chairperson, at pbreivik@email.sjsu.edu as soon as possible indicating your acceptance unless you have already done so (or contacted Woody Horton). All invitees must sign the Attachment B document and mail the document according to instructions.

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We must emphasize that financing for the meeting is still being secured, and you are therefore admonished not to make any irrevocable travel and related plans until you receive final notification from us that sufficient funds are available to defray your travel, per diem, and other related costs. Funds are available for the commissioned paper stipend, and you will be paid separately when your paper is submitted and accepted (unless you indicate on Attachment B that the stipend should be applied to offset your travel costs). We will notify you no later than January 31, 2002, of funding availability for your travel. Home institutions, or other employers, are kindly requested to cover travel expenses wherever possible because of limited available funding.

We sincerely hope that you will be able to join us in this historic event! The outcomes of this planning Meeting of Experts, and the larger conference, will provide much needed guidance to all nations – both developing and industrial, and in all regions of the world – as they seek to wisely mobilize and harness the capabilities of today's information resources to benefit their economies and industries, their social institutions, their public policy-makers, and their individual citizens.

If you have any questions, please call Patricia Breivik at (408) 924-2419, or Woody Horton of my staff at (202) 606-9200.

Sincerely yours,

Robert S. Willard
Executive Director

enclosure